

## “EYEBORGS” (DVD/Blu-ray Review)

Written by Allan Dart

Thursday, 15 July 2010 10:25

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It's never a good sign when a movie begins with opening text to provide viewers with some backstory—and also has a narrator *speaking* the words. Isn't that sort of redundant? That's the inauspicious start to EYEBORGS (out on DVD and Blu-ray from Image Entertainment), a potentially interesting SF take on the war on terror that features impressive low-budget visual FX but is ultimately bogged down by a stagnant script, unnecessarily long and sluggish exposition scenes and a somber tone that works against its Syfy creature-feature premise.

It's the near future, and the war on terror has escalated to the point where privacy is a thing of the past. The Department of Homeland Security now relies on ODIN (Optical Defense Intelligence Network) to “monitor” possible criminal activity using a universal camera network system. Eyeborgs are one branch of that network: They're mobile robotic cameras that watch people in their homes, on the streets and in the workplace, and they look something like a cross between the mechanical alien lifeforms in *\*BATTERIES NOT INCLUDED* and evil crab automatons. *HIGHLANDER* TV series star Adrian Paul plays Federal Agent Gunner Reynolds. His tragic history led to the Eyeborgs bill being passed, but his faith in the robot security starts to wane when an investigation into a series of bizarre Eyeborg-related deaths and an assassination attempt on the President's nephew cause him to question the machines' motivation and lawfulness.



Another pair of plotlines involve Barbara Hawkins (Megan Blake)—a feisty reporter who also grows suspect of Homeland Security and its enforcement methods after her cameraman dies in what Hawkins believes was a staged “accident” backed up by edited and inaccurate Eyeborg footage—and Jarett Hewes (Luke Eberl), the purple-haired punk rocker who is the President's estranged nephew and on the run after the assassination attempt. As these threads come together, it becomes evident that there's a plot to kill the President and somehow, some way, the Eyeborgs and Homeland Security are involved.

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Observation vs. invasion of privacy. Government management vs. government interference. The war on terror vs. personal freedoms. Director Richard Clabaugh's film is very topical, but in approaching this material seriously, he undercuts the story's genre foundations. Heck, Clabaugh (who also helmed the monster movie PYTHON) even says in one of the discs' featurettes that he wanted to make a creature flick, and used robots because they look more real in CGI. Sure, you could make a serious, in-depth SF-drama with this narrative, but not when your film is titled EYEBORGS, features mini-robots that recall ATTACK OF THE CRAB MONSTERS and sports a brief appearance by Danny Trejo as a conspiracy theorist named G-Man.

EYEBORGS is neither fish nor fowl. On a serious level, the movie repeatedly references how “We the People” no longer run the country and how our personal freedoms have been sacrificed in the name of security, and there are several tedious passages that convey this message and pad EYEBORGS' 102-minute running time. (By the way, how could the country pay for what I would assume to be millions of these hi-tech machines? And how could there possibly be enough staff to monitor all that digital footage?) On a creature-feature, guilty-pleasure level, the movie fails to offer any over-the-top robot mayhem. The Eyeborg attacks are played straight, but are devoid of any tension or entertainment. I'm sorry, but when a robot crustacean is boring a hole through someone's head, you've got to have a sense of humor about it.

Presented on the discs in widescreen 2.35:1, EYEBORGS looks very slick and polished for a low-budget film. However—and I've been noticing this a lot lately in indie horror—Clabaugh falls victim to trying to emulate Paul Greengrass, and the result is distractingly overactive camerawork. The Dolby Digital 5.1 audio is also fine, though I wasn't a fan of the score by Mark Brisbane and Guy-Roger Duvert.

A collection of behind-the-scenes featurettes, several deleted scenes and a trailer make up the extras. The making-of portion is broken down into five segments: “Making EYEBORGS,” “Stunts,” “Visual FX,” “How to Make Robots in 3 Minutes” and a blooper reel. Clabaugh and producer John S. Rushton do most of the talking on the first of these, offering their thoughts on EYEBORGS' conception and the production's short and hectic schedule. Stunt coordinator Dale Girard (who also has a crucial role in the film) discusses EYEBORGS' impressive action gags, which include falls, fire, fights, gunplay and explosions. In the “Visual FX” segment, various members of the digital team talk about how they filled empty frames with CG robots on a very low budget (good work, guys!). The last two bits are of a humorous nature: a sped-up look at creating the Eyeborgs and an assortment of outtakes. The deleted material is unexciting, excepting the “Barbara Meets Ed” sequence that contains some unfinished (and funny) FX.

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MOVIE:  

DVD PACKAGE:  

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